



WOUNDED WARRIOR

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Asking for help is sign of strength not weakness

by Maj. Gen. Mark Brown and
Master Sgt. Derik New
2nd Air Force

KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. -- Growing up I was a big fan of Muhammad Ali. He was the world heavyweight boxing champion and unashamedly referred to himself as "The Greatest." I vividly remember a reporter asking Ali, "When did you know that you were 'The Greatest?'" Before Ali could answer, the reporter offered, "Perhaps it was when you knocked out George Foreman in 1974?"

Ali shook his head in disagreement, so the reporter continued.

"Maybe it was when you destroyed Sonny Liston in the world heavyweight championship in 1964?" Again, Ali shook his head.

Then Ali told the story of when he knew he was the greatest. It happened in 1973 when he faced Ken Norton at the San Diego Sports Arena. As Ali entered the arena, the

crowd was in a frenzy, cheering "Ali, Ali, Ali!"

The world champion stepped in the ring and quickly found himself overmatched against the bigger Norton, suffering a broken jaw in the second round. Ali found the strength to finish the 12-round bout, but suffered only his second defeat in 43 professional fights. Through this trial, after having his jaw broken and being knocked senseless but somehow remaining on his feet, is when Ali truly came to believe he was the greatest.

To prove that point, Ali went on to beat Ken Norton in their next two matches.

Being knocked out and having to bounce back is all but inevitable for most of us. This is especially true for those of us in the business of delivering air power for America. Our mission can be stressful and those stresses can be further complicated by the everyday challenges of life. The good

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Send your comments, feedback

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E-mail: wounded.warrior@us.af.mil

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Finding life's new direction after a loss

By Airman 1st Class Erica Crossen
375th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. -- Sometimes it takes a difficult situation in your life to not only be reminded of the things you are truly grateful for, but also to serve as a catalyst for change.

That moment for me came during the beginning of 2012 when my mother died suddenly at just 43 years old.

We had just finished observing Christmas and like always, she was the absolute fixture in our celebrations.

I can still hear the sound of my mom's laughter, smell the delicious food we prepared and see the tree twinkling as it sheltered cheerful little packages beneath it. She would initiate "Star Wars" and "Godfather" movie marathons as part of our yearly traditions, and I never expected that anything could shatter my excitement for this time of the year.

However, the new year began in a tragic way. Mom had collapsed and hit her head, hard. She was admitted into an intensive care unit, slipping into unresponsiveness due to a brain hemorrhage. My husband drove us eight hours to the hospital where I found her on life support with the haunting beeping and



alarms going off in her room. It was the worst thing to have to hold her hand and acknowledge that she was truly gone, never to smile proudly at future graduations or hold my children as a grandmother.

After I lost my mom, I never thought the holidays could regain their happy luster. It was a hard reality to accept that I couldn't just pick up the phone and talk to her. I was so angry with her and confused as to why she let her health decline, leaving me and my sister without a mom.

As you can imagine, as the next holiday season approached I looked at it as something to get through. She had represented the togetherness of friends and family, and now she was gone. I had to make sense of it, and I continued to do a lot of soul-searching.

During this process I

decided that while I could hold on to her legacy of a great sense of humor and honor the way she loved me, there were unhealthy lifestyle habits I needed to let go of. That's when I decided that I needed to take care of my body better and eventually I lost 50 pounds.

After achieving success with that goal, I then decided to join the Air Force. I'd been an Air Force spouse for four years, but my mom's death made me realize that I shouldn't wait to do the things I felt I needed to do.

With a new outlook on life, I felt I could power through anything. I wanted to make every moment count and not regret at least trying. I wanted the next holiday season at home to be a time of looking back on what I had accomplished that year.

It was the Christmas I spent in basic training down at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, that I realized I had become part of another family with new traditions which helped fill the emptiness from my mother's passing. On Christmas Eve we marched to the chapel for services and as I looked around me, I knew the other trainees were experiencing difficulties, too. Some were missing their children, some were still trying to adjust to this new life, and some were just missing friends and family back home.

As we marched under a crisp star-lit Texas sky, our "Lackland Laser" flashlights swung in unison. It made the ground sway with light, competing with the sky, and it seemed almost magical. For someone half-way through training and with just two days to

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Sometimes it's those difficult circumstances that help us change and grow the most.

— Airman 1st Class Erica Crossen

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New year brings new leadership to division

With a new year comes new leadership. Lt. Col. Carol Gordon has replaced Lt. Col. Susan Black -- who is retiring -- as chief of the Warrior and Survivor Care Division at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas.

In her new duties, Gordon ensures Airmen who are seriously wounded, ill or injured receive world-class medical support, care, and treatment. She also oversees nearly 90 staff members in the daily operations of the Air Force Recovery Coordination Program at 43 locations, as well as oversees the service's Adaptive Sports Program. Gordon is the lead agent to the Department of Defense for policy development in care, transition, employment, and benefits for recovering Airmen and serves as principal adviser to senior leadership on wounded warrior matters and congressional initiatives.

"I am honored to join a team of people with the sole focus of helping others," said Gordon. "This team provides extraordinary care and assistance to our wounded

warriors and their families by helping them navigate their way through an often complex personnel process. While our Airmen focus on recovering, we focus on the details."

Before taking charge of the AFW2 program, Gordon served as deputy of the Air Force Physical Disabilities Division at the Air Force Personnel Center. In that position, she was responsible for the processing of services personnel through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System and overseeing the administrative functioning of all the programs within the division.

Hailing from Broomall, Pennsylvania, Gordon has been in the Air Force for 33 years. Before being stationed here, she served in various locations and assignments in Colorado, North Dakota, the Pentagon, Arizona, Japan and Afghanistan.

An Air Force Wounded Warrior is any seriously or very seriously wounded, ill or injured Airman identified on a casualty report, or recommended by the medical community, as having highly complex medical conditions. Also included are



Lt. Col. Carol Gordon

Airmen who have been referred to the IDES for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and/or other mental health conditions, or for medical conditions related to deployment.

"I'm looking forward to this assignment and providing the support our Airmen deserve, specifically those facing challenges who need our special care and guidance," Gordon said. "This is truly what the Air Force family is all about and being an Airman for life"



2014 Air Force Year in Photos

August O'Neill getting kissed by his service dog, Kai, is just one of nearly 100 photos representing 2014 for the Air Force. The photos feature Airmen around the globe. O'Neill, an Air Force wounded warrior, competed last year in the Warrior Games. To see more photos, click [here](#). (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Jette Carr)

Services and Resources

MilitaryConnection.com is a portal of all things military with thousands of pages of resources and information provided free to users. MilitaryConnection.com is often referred to as the "go-to site." The site has information on government jobs, military schools, military loans and detailed information on military pay charts. Its online directories of resources and information feature vital information on military education and benefits including the GI Bill.



The [Real Warriors Campaign](#) is an initiative launched by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury to promote the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration of returning service members, veterans and their families.



A growing number of law schools, state bar associations and legal aid programs are adding free legal clinics focused on the needs of service members or veterans. [Legal Services Corporation](#), a nonprofit corporation, promotes equal access to justice by awarding grants to legal services providers through a competitive grants process. Free legal aid providers refer people to specialty legal clinics throughout the United States.

H&R Block offers free tax courses for spouses

Annual enrollment for H&R Block's Income Tax Course is open and H&R Block will award full scholarships covering the cost of tuition and books for spouses of active, reserve, wounded warrior and retired military personnel. H&R Block has offered these scholarships over the past 10 years and in 2013, H&R Block granted over \$100,000 in military Income Tax Course scholarships.

The course teaches the skills necessary to become a professional tax preparer and is helpful for people who want to better understand their own taxes. Students can learn something new and could potentially earn extra money.

"Offering full-ride scholarships for the Income Tax Course to military spouses is just one way to show our appreciation to our nation's service

with them anywhere in the country," said Denise Stoll, program manager of the Income Tax Course for H&R Block.

H&R Block not only has expertise in tax return preparation, but also the ability to make taxes easy to understand and applicable to the needs of individual taxpayers. Topics covered in the Income Tax Course curriculum include:

- Filing requirements
- Exemptions and adjustments to income
- Wages, income and taxes
- Interest and dividend income
- Earned Income Credit
- Retirement contributions.

The course offers a unique blended-learning approach for students. It combines interactive discussion, one-on-one assistance and hands-on experience with tax preparation software and computer training. At some locations, bilingual classes are taught in English and the instructor, or assistant, will be able to answer questions in Spanish as needed. In bilingual courses, textbooks will be provided in both English and Spanish and course exams will be offered in a bilingual format.

Graduates receive H&R Block certification, a certificate of completion and qualifying continuing education hours.

For more information, visit www.hrblock.com. To enroll in H&R Block's Income Tax Course call 888-412-7880 or register [online](#).



members and their families. In addition to teaching them more about preparing their own taxes, this course will teach new skills they can take

Special Events

Higher Ground events offer winter therapy

Higher Ground Sun Valley has a military program offering therapeutic recreation to facilitate a change in perspective, giving injured service members physical skills, confidence and coping strategies.

The staff serves veterans -- with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and other polytrauma.

HG hosts eight weeklong sports camps annually, each completely free of charge to veterans and their supporters. The camps serve eight to 10 participants and are designed for specific populations such as couples, men and women.

The environment creates an intimate atmosphere where participants connect and share struggles related to battle trauma and injuries, while supporters share challenges about health care, parenting, and their role as caregivers.

HG's trained staff of certified recreational therapists strategically implements activities that highlight individual abilities, leading to an overall improvement in quality of life.

The HG program commits to three years of follow-up care for each participant, helping to connect participants to their local resources and dedicating a reintegration budget for each participant to help them achieve their individual goals.

For more information, click [here](#).



The Air Force Wounded Warrior program offers several social media outlets for people to learn more about the program and communicate with each other. Just click on an icon:



Do you need to update your contact information?

NOTE - Updates should be provided to: AFW2 Program Office, AFPC Disabilities Branch, DEERS, DFAS, and the VA.

AFW2 Program Office – Call **800-581-9437** or via email: wounded.warrior@us.af.mil

AFPC Disabilities Branch for people on the Temporary Disability Retired List – Email disability@us.af.mil

Based on the last four digits of your Social Security number, call:

(0001-2499) **210-565-5561** (2500-4999) **210-565-5564** (5000-7499) **210-565-5562** (7500-9999) **210-565-5660**

DEERS – Updating info in DEERS is accomplished in one of three ways:

Call **800-538-9552**

Visit a military base ID card issuance facility

Visit the website at: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect/faces/index.jspx?>

DFAS – Online at “myPay” website: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

VA – Call **800-827-1000** or visit www.va.gov for the nearest VA office

